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UNCLAS KATHMANDU 002492

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS AND DS/IP/SA

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SUBJECT: KATHMANDU VALLEY STRIKE SHUTS DOWN BUSINESS, HALTS TRANSPORT

REF: KATHMANDU 2484

**¶11.** The December 29-30 general strike ("bandh") called by the Maoists in the Narayani and Bagmati zones, the latter of which includes the Kathmandu Valley (Reftel), was generally well observed throughout the city. The roads were empty of most public and private transportation both days, with the exception of diplomatic vehicles, army trucks, and a few intrepid motorcycles (with license plate numbers blocked out). Approximately 80 percent of shops and stores remained shuttered along the main roads, although slightly more businesses ventured to open the second day.

**¶12.** The Valley was generally quiet for the duration of the two-day strike. On December 27 four armed Maoists bombed the Village Development Committee (VDC) building in Gongabu, 3 km north of the Embassy, after forcing the employees out at mid-day. No one was injured in the incident. The same day in Nuwakot District, approximately 35 km north of the capital, armed Maoists burnt down a residence previously owned by Princess Helen Shah, aunt of King Gyanendra. No one was hurt in the incident, although the property suffered extensive damage.

**¶13.** Comment: The strike may have been timed to disrupt festivities planned to celebrate the December 30 birthday of Crown Prince Paras. As in previous Maoist strikes, the high degree of observance is more attributable to popular fear of the insurgents and their terrorist tactics, than to support for their ideology. In any case, adherence to periodic Maoist bands can be expected as long as local residents feel unable to rely on the Government to protect them should they defy Maoist diktats.

MALINOWSKI